



Preparing a Liturgy for students at Exam Time

Some ideas to help with the preparation for a Mass or another liturgy with students who are preparing to sit exams

Someone once said, 'As long as there are exams, there will be prayer in schools.' Exams are a massive moment in the lives of young people and their families and so they present an opportunity for the Church community to reach out to students and their families. Below are some ideas that could be part of an exam liturgy or Mass. If your Mass or liturgy is specifically for exam students and their families you are free to be more creative. However if you celebrate it as part of a weekend Mass it is important to be sensitive to the regular worshippers, although it could be a lovely opportunity for all to experience the fullness of the Christian community. Take from the following suggestions as appropriate to the occasion and setting.

Create a Sacred Space

Exam papers and timetable, names/crests of the local secondary schools, pens, pencils, pencil case, rulers, calculators, cross and prayer cards etc. Inspirational quotes could be placed around the church.

Possible Entrance Procession

You could begin by processing in with the exam candle while each student carries an unlit candle with their name on it. They place their candles in the sacred space or keep it with them in their assigned seats for a later blessing.

Possible Offertory Procession

After a word of welcome invite those present to sit for an offertory procession.

- X brings forward a calculator to remind our students that they can count on the love and prayers of the church and their families and friends at this time.
- X brings forward an atlas to remind us that wherever we go in the world God is with us and so we are never truly alone.
- X brings forward a history book to remind us that God is not just a historical figure. The name 'Emmanuel' reminds us that God is with us both in good times and in bad.
- X brings forward an exam candle. Later in the ceremony the students will light their own candle from this candle. This exam candle will be lit at all of our Masses during the exam period as we try to carry the students and their families with our prayers.

Penitential Rite

If your liturgy is within the context of a Mass you can mention that we begin each Mass with an exam, an examination of conscience.

You are the light in our darkness –
Lord, have mercy.
You are the hope in our despair –
Christ, have mercy.
You are the peace in our chaos –
Lord, have mercy.

Liturgy of the Word

Isaiah 43:1-3, Gospel of Pentecost or the final passage of Matthew (know that I am with you).

Sample Prayers of the Faithful

We pray that the Church will carry both students and their families in its thoughts and prayers during the exams. Lord, hear us.

We pray for all students especially those who are feeling stressed. May they realise that their worth and value cannot be measure by exams and may they be carried by the love of family, friends and neighbours. Lord, hear us.

We pray that the students will draw on the fruits and gifts of the Holy Spirit that they possess and we pray that the Spirit will gift them with peace, wisdom and courage at this time. Lord, hear us.

We remember the families of our students. It can be a stressful time for everyone and so we pray families will be a source of blessing, light and love for each other. Lord, hear us.

We pray in thanksgiving for our teachers and the ways in which our schools and teachers create communities of inspiration and encouragement. Lord, hear us.

We pray for young people throughout our country and our world who do not get the opportunities to learn and we also remember those students who may receive very little support, may they find within themselves the inspiration and determination they need to keep going. Lord, hear us.

Sample Post Communion Reflection (if not reading the exam prayer from the prayer card)

I asked God to bless you, as I prayed for you today,
To guide you and protect you, as you go along your way...
His love is always with you, his promises are true,
And when we give him all our cares, you know He will see us through.
So when the road you're travelling on, seems difficult at best.
Just remember we're here praying, and God will do the rest.

Blessing of Exam Candle

Lord you are the light of the world. May your light guide and comfort us. We ask you to both bless this candle, the students' candles and more importantly bless the students. May these lights serve to remind them of your presence. Light brings comfort and warmth and hope and may this comfort, warmth and hope touch the hearts and lives of the students especially on difficult days. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

(Light the exam candle from the Paschal candle and if you felt it was safe and feasible, with tapers pass this light to the students and together pray the prayer that is on their prayer card).

An Exam Prayer (for prayer card)

God stay close to me today
Guide my study and light my way.
Ease my nerves and comfort me

With peace and love so tenderly.
May I remember the things I need
And understand all I study and read.
May I strive to give my best
And do myself justice in each test.
May the topics I know and like appear
On the exam paper to lessen my fear.
And during the moments I may feel stressed
I'll try to remember the ways I'm blessed.
And if there are times that I feel at sea,
Help me to trust that you're here with me.
Amen.

Adopt a student/Student Prayer Basket

Encourage people to put the names of exam students on slips of paper and place them in a basket. These students will be remembered in prayer during the exams. Equally you could ask your daily Mass goers to adopt a student. They could take a name from the basket and pray for that student for the duration of the exams (you could ask them to remember the name/s they have drawn and place them back in a different basket so that you will be left with the names people have given).

Final Procession

Students could walk out with their candles and prayer cards.

Obviously the more young people you can include in the liturgy the better. These are just a few ideas and people could pick and choose and bring their own creativity to bear on this important occasion. If you have a specific gathering of young people and parents you can add some humour to the end of your liturgy – 'I've got the Leaving' song, a funny student prayer and also you could put together a power point presentation of funny exam answers. Any effort made by a parish or a community to reach out to exam students, will be very welcome as young people and their families are both very appreciative and receptive of any efforts made.

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